

Exercise prescription

This involved a 5- to 10-minute appointment. A general practitioner (GP) used a checklist to standardise the sessions and deal with issues previously identified about initiating and maintaining exercise: the benefits of exercise, the target to aim for, finding something to enjoy, building it into daily life, starting slowly, and anticipating relapse. The GP then wrote out a prescription for brisk exercise that was fast enough to make the patient short of breath for at least 30 minutes, five times per week. The exercise encouraged was brisk walking, and it did not therefore require a leisure facility, but if patients did not like walking they were encouraged to find a regular exercise that they enjoyed. The prescription was given to the patients and they were asked to place it in a prominent place at home.

Counselling session

This was a slightly longer session, lasting approximately 15 to 20 minutes. A nurse discussed a checklist similar to that given to the GP and, in addition, had a motivational discussion with the patient based on the theory of planned behaviour,¹⁹ asking the patient about their attitudes to exercise and perceived behavioural control, and their confidence in being able to exercise. The patient was encouraged by the nurse to find their own solutions; for example, if the patient did not feel confident in being able to exercise, then the nurse would ask them to think about what would make them more confident. The nurse then ran through a 'behavioural rehearsal' with the subject, about where and when exercise was likely to take place; this has been shown in other settings to increase the likelihood of implementation.^{15,29} An agreed target and contract to exercise was signed by the patient and witnessed by the nurse, and the patient was given a diary to record sessions of exercise.

Booklet

A booklet produced by the Health Education Authority entitled '*Getting Active, feeling fit*' was used.¹⁹ Subjects were asked to take it away, read it carefully, and keep it in a safe place. They were told that the aim of the booklet was to encourage regular exercise, i.e. approximately 30 minutes of brisk walking or the equivalent, 5 days per week.

Supplementary box 1. Types of intervention.

Supplementary reference

29. Cockcroft A, Gooch C, Ellinghouse C, *et al.* Evaluation of a programme of health measurements and advice among hospital staff. *Occup Med* 1994; **44**: 70-76.